



Slavery and Conversion in the American Colonies

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SLAVERY AND CONVERSION IN THE AMERICAN COLONIES¹

FROM the time of Christian Rome to a period within the memory of many now living, slavery has flourished in Christian lands and nowhere, in modern times, to such an extent as in our own country. Even before the Revolution probably a million negroes had lived as slaves within the boundaries of the American colonies. But, in spite of the fact that religious motives were so prominent in the settlement of these colonies, and religion was a subject which occupied the thought and effort of private individuals, denominations, missionary societies, and even legislative bodies to an extraordinary degree, most of the slaves lived and died strangers to Christianity, and with religious and moral ideals but little better than those developed under the pagan and superstitious beliefs prevalent in their native land. With comparatively few exceptions the conversion of negro slaves was not seriously undertaken by their masters. On the contrary, many of them strenuously and persistently opposed the Church of England and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the agencies most active in promoting conversion. The conflict between these forces forms an interesting chapter in the history of slavery and Christianity in the American colonies. The following study considers for the most part one aspect only of this struggle, *viz.*, the more direct agencies and forces which promoted or hindered the conversion of the negro slave, and the progress made up to the opening of the American Revolution.

One of the arguments offered in defense of the modern slave-trade, was that which justified the enslavement of the negro on the ground that he was an infidel. In the ancient world all men were considered equally capable of becoming slaves; but with the conversion of the people of northern Europe to Christianity the custom of enslaving prisoners of war gradually ceased as between Christian nations, though between Christians and Mohammedans the practice continued.² Thus at the time when America was first colonized, the opinion was widely held that the inhabitants of an infidel nation could be rightfully made slaves by those of a Christian nation.

¹ This study is an elaboration of certain portions of a paper read by the author at the meeting of the American Historical Association at Charleston, S. C., December, 1913.

² Hurd, *Law of Freedom and Bondage*, I. 160-161.

Some believed that heathens and barbarians were placed by the circumstance of their infidelity without the pale of spiritual and civil rights and that their souls were doomed to eternal perdition.³ Others, more charitable, brought forward another argument, perhaps to quiet their consciences and enable them to share in the profits of the slave-trade. They declared that the enslavement of the negro was an act of mercy, because only through slavery could large numbers be brought to Christ. Some of the papal bulls of the fifteenth century granted to Catholic princes the privilege of making war on the Saracens and other infidels, for this reason;⁴ and European monarchs sometimes allowed companies of discoverers, commercial adventurers, etc., the right to trade in slaves, partly because conversion might thereby be promoted.⁵

This religious sanction for slavery raised many troublesome questions. It appears that some believed that the conversion of a negro to Christianity entitled him to freedom, on the ground that one Christian should not hold another as a slave; others asserted that after conversion he should at least have certain religious privileges that were conferred on other persons because they were Christians or members of a Christian state.⁶ The question giving most trouble was that which concerned the effect of conversion or baptism. If proof of heathenism legalized the enslavement of a negro, would his subsequent conversion to Christianity be a reason for enfranchisement? The practice of certain European nations favored enslavement even after conversion. Thus Mohammedan slaves in Spain and Portugal were not often freed when Christianized.⁷ The French *Code Noir* of 1685 obliged every planter to have his negroes baptized and properly instructed in the doctrines and duties of Christianity.⁸ In Mohammedan states conversion of a slave from a different faith to Islam was not usually a legal cause for enfranchisement.⁹ But in England and her colonies many believed that such conversion or baptism should be a cause for manumission. The lawfulness of the enslavement of negroes in England came be-

³ 7 Coke 17, Calvin's case (*Reports*, ed. 1826, IV. 29); Prescott, *Ferdinand and Isabella* (ed. Kirk, 1872), II. 468.

⁴ Cf. bull of Nicholas V., January 8, 1455, referring to conquests in Guinea, and "Guineans and other negroes". The bull is printed in Jordão, *Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae Regum in Ecclesiis Africae, Asiae atque Oceaniae*, etc., I. 31-34.

⁵ Hurd, I. 163; Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of South Carolina and Georgia* (London, 1779), in Carroll, *Historical Collections of South Carolina*, I. 353.

⁶ Chamberline v. Harvey (1697), in 5 *Modern Reports* 190; Prescott, p. 468.

⁷ Hurd, I. 166-167, note 3, and authorities cited.

⁸ Isambert, Decrusy, and Taillandier, *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises* (Paris, 1829), XIX. 495 (1672-1686).

⁹ Hurd, I. 167. But see Chamberline v. Harvey for contrary opinion.

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fore the courts on several occasions but the cases are in conflict. A few decisions seem to have been based on the principle that infidel negroes could be held as slaves, but when baptized and domiciled as inhabitants they should be enfranchised.¹⁰ At any rate there arose in the minds of many American colonists the notion that under English law a baptized slave might claim freedom. Conscientious masters thus found themselves in a dilemma: to deny conversion and baptism would retard Christianization; to favor it might cause them the loss of their property. To avoid this dilemma, some of the colonial assemblies altered the religious sanction for slavery and based its validity frankly upon race. While positively denying that conversion or baptism was a sufficient reason for enfranchisement and insisting that all slaves must serve for life, they at the same time called upon masters to use their efforts to convert slaves to the Christian religion.

Thus between 1664 and 1706 at least six of the colonies passed acts affirming this principle. Maryland (1664) declared that all slaves must serve for life in order to prevent damage which masters might sustain if their slaves pretended to be Christians and so pleaded the law of England.¹¹ Again in 1671, because some had feared to import, purchase, convert, or baptize negroes or slaves, owing to a belief based on an "ungrounded apprehension that by becomeing Christians they and the Issues of their bodies are actually manumitted and made free and discharged from their Servitude and bondage", it was declared that the conversion or baptism of negroes or other slaves before or after their importation should not be a cause for manumission.¹² A Virginia act of 1667 declared that slaves by birth were not freed when baptized. The preamble states that it was passed because doubt had arisen in the minds of owners of slaves on this point, and "that diverse masters, freed from this doubt, may more carefully endeavour the propagation of christianity by permitting children, though slaves, or those of greater growth if capable to be admitted to that sacrament".¹³ Virginia now proceeded with the notion that a negro Christianized before importation could not be enslaved for life. By the act of 1670 only those imported by shipping and not already Christians were to

¹⁰ *Butts v. Penny* (1677), 2 Levinz 201, in *English Reports*, LXXXIII. 518; *Gelly v. Cleve* (1694), 1 Lord Raymond 147, *ibid.*, XCI. 994; *Chamberline v. Harvey*, p. 191. Judgment was for defendant in this case, but counsel for plaintiff argued that negroes baptized "in a christian nation, as this is, should be an immediate enfranchisement to them", etc.

¹¹ *Archives of Maryland*, I. 526, 533.

¹² *Ibid.*, II. 272. This act was still in force in 1765. Bacon, *Laws of Maryland*, chs. XXIII-XXIV. of the act of 1715.

¹³ Hening, *Statutes of Virginia* (New York ed.), II. 260.

be slaves for life.¹⁴ This act was repealed in 1682 because it allowed a Christian slave to be sold "for noe longer time then the English or other christians are to serve", and was thus a great discouragement to bringing in slaves.¹⁵ This act with that of 1705¹⁶ made all imported servants slaves, excepting those who were Christians in their native country or free in some Christian country before their importation, thus practically confining slavery to the negro races. North Carolina, South Carolina, New York, and New Jersey all affirmed the principle by denying that freedom resulted from baptism.¹⁷ Those colonies which do not appear to have taken action were Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, and all the New England colonies.¹⁸ It is clear, however, that the assemblies in colonies where slaves were most numerous were anxious to remove the doubt respecting the effect of baptism, and at the same time encourage the conversion of slaves.

The forces thus far mentioned promoted to a greater or less degree the conversion of imported negroes, even though they were compelled to live in a state of bondage. For the removal of large numbers from an environment in which paganism and superstition were the ruling forces, even though accomplished through slave-traders, to one in which Christianity prevailed, made probable the conversion of a greater number of negroes than would otherwise have been possible. The removal by legislative action of doubt as to the effect of baptism, and the favorable attitude shown towards conversion by the assemblies, doubtless encouraged some masters to withdraw opposition to conversion. However, as the matter was still uncertain, even after 1704, the opinion of Yorke and Talbot, attorney and solicitor general respectively, was asked. They replied (1729) that baptism did not alter the status of the slave.¹⁹

We may now consider other influential agencies and forces

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 447. Excepting "Turks and Moors in Amity with her majesty"

¹⁷ Fundamental Constitutions, 1669-1670, in *North Carolina Colonial Records*, I. 204; and revision of 1698, *ibid.*, II. 857; McCord, *Statutes of South Carolina*, VII. 343 (act of 1690), and pp. 364-365 (act of 1712); *Colonial Laws of New York*, I. 597-598 (1706). The New Jersey act was passed in 1704, but was disallowed. Trott, *Laws of the British Plantations in America*, p. 257; *Acts of Privy Council, Colonial Series*, 1680-1720, p. 848.

¹⁸ Such an act was requested in Massachusetts in a memorial to the general court from "Many Ministers of the Gospel", May 30, 1694. *Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay*, VII. 537. See note 67.

¹⁹ The opinion is printed in Hurd, I. 185-186, note 3. It referred, however, to slaves brought into Great Britain from the colonies. On the tendency to accept English laws as applicable to the colonies, see Hildreth, *History of the United States* (New York, 1863), II. 426. Dean Berkeley, in his sermon before the S. P. G., 1731, said that this opinion was printed in Rhode Island, "and dispersed throughout the plantations". See Updike, *History of the Episcopal Church in Narragansett, Rhode Island* (1847), p. 177.

which promoted the conversion of slaves, first, with respect to English official bodies. As early as December 1, 1660, instructions were given by the king to the Council for Foreign Plantations, one of which was,

And you are to consider how such of the Natives or such as are purchased by you from other parts to be servants or slaves may be best invited to the Christian Faith, and be made capable of being baptized thereunto, it being to the honor of our Crowne and of the Protestant Religion that all persons in any of our Dominions should be taught the knowledge of God, and be made acquainted with the misteries of Salvation.²⁰

Instructions to governors of the colonies frequently contained a clause urging them to use their efforts to have slaves Christianized. For example, Governor Dongan of New York was instructed on this point (1686): "You are alsoe with the assistance of Our Council to find out the best means to facilitate and encourage the Conversion of Negroes and Indians to the Christian Religion." Similar instructions were given to later governors of New York and other colonies. Culpeper, governor of Virginia, was enjoined in his instructions (1682) to inquire what would be the best means of facilitating the conversion of slaves, but was warned not to throw in jeopardy individual property in the negro or to render less stable the safety of the colony.²¹ Some of the governors urged the assemblies to pass bills for this purpose,²² and used their efforts to promote conversion in other ways. Thus a communication by the governor to the council of Maryland, March 18, 1698/9, called attention to his instructions relating to the conversion of negroes and Indians, and because of information that several hindered and obstructed their negroes from attending church, though baptized, advised that a law should be recommended to the assembly to remedy the evil.²³ The replies of the governors to queries of the Lords of Trade show that some of them reported progress in this work.²⁴ Through such efforts the assemblies were influenced to pass bills

²⁰ *Documents relating to the Colonial History of New York*, III. 36. See also *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*, 1574-1660, pp. 492-493.

²¹ *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, III. 374, also p. 547 (1688); for Virginia, Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, II. 97; for Maryland, *Archives of Maryland*, 1698-1731, XXV. 57; for North Carolina (1754), *N. C. Col. Rec.*, V. 1138.

²² *E. g.*, Governor Bellomont (1699), *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, IV. 510-511.

²³ *Arch. of Md.*, XXV. 57. See also *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, 1712-1713, letter of Elias Neau, catechist to the S. P. G., 1712, reporting that Governor Hunter of New York urged masters to give religious instruction to their slaves.

²⁴ *Colonial Records of Connecticut*, 1678-1689, pp. 293, 298; *Cal. St. P., Col.*, 1681-1685, p. 497 (Va., 1683); and *Arch. of Md.*, V. 267 (1678).

furthering the conversion of negroes, as already pointed out. Some of them also passed acts to prevent masters from working their slaves on Sunday²⁵ and to prevent them from hindering their slaves attending church on Sunday.²⁶

More important than these agencies of the state, were the religious denominations and forces which promoted conversion. The Church of England stands first in importance, working through unofficial and official agencies. Morgan Godwyn, at one time a rector in Virginia, published a book in 1680 called *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*. It is a severe criticism of the masters of slaves in the plantations; and in the dedication to the Archbishop of Canterbury the author implores relief "for those Myriads of hungry and distressed Souls abroad . . . our Peoples Slaves and Vassals, but from whom also the Bread of Life is most sacrilegiously detained".²⁷ From 1679 the Bishop of London exercised considerable jurisdiction over the Church of England in the colonies, and from this date was active in its interest.²⁸ He appointed, in 1689, Rev. James Blair as commissary for Virginia, and, in 1696, Rev. Thomas Bray for Maryland.²⁹ The former urged upon a committee of the House of Burgesses, who had in hand a revision of the laws, a proposition "for the encouragement of the Christian Education of our Negro and Indian Children".³⁰ The latter, on his return to England in 1700, succeeded in procuring a charter for the S. P. G. (1701) destined to be the most important single agency in furthering the conversion of the negro.³¹ He had previously prepared a plan of a society for carrying on work "Amongst that Poorer sort of people, as also amongst the Blacks and Native Indians".³² The Bishop of London stimulated interest in the conversion of negroes in 1724 through his queries to the clergy of several colonies,³³ and again in 1727 through three published letters:³⁴ one

²⁵ E. g., South Carolina, 1712 and 1740; Trott, *Laws*, p. 71; and McCord, *Stat. of S. C.*, VII. 404; *St. Rec. of N. C.*, XXIII. 3-4 (1715). See note 86.

²⁶ Hening, *Stat. of Va.* (Richmond ed.), IV. 129; same act, 1748, *ibid.*, VI. 108. Compare also the New Jersey act, 1751, Allinson, *Acts of the General Assembly of New Jersey, 1702-1776*, pp. 191-192. See note 111.

²⁷ *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, etc. (London, 1680).

²⁸ N. Y. Col. Docs., VII. 362-363.

²⁹ Perry, *History of the American Episcopal Church*, I. 138.

³⁰ Perry, *Historical Collections relating to the American Colonial Church* (Va.), p. 112.

³¹ *Classified Digest of Records of the S. P. G.* (fifth ed.), p. 5.

³² Kemp, *The Support of Schools in Colonial New York by the S. P. G.*, pp. 14-15.

³³ The queries, with answers, for Virginia and Maryland, are printed by Perry, in *Hist. Coll. rel. to the Am. Col. Ch.* (Va.), pp. 261-318; (Md.), pp. 190-232. See also for Maryland, 1731, pp. 303-307. See note 119.

³⁴ These are printed by Humphreys, *An Historical Account of the S. P. G.*, etc. (London, 1730), pp. 250-275; the first two are in Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina*, pp. 104-114.

to masters and mistresses of slaves; another to the missionaries commanding them to distribute copies of this letter and use their efforts to promote conversion; and a third to "Serious Christians", asking for money to promote the work of conversion among the slaves.

An agency of still greater importance was the missionary society of the Church of England founded in 1701, "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts".³⁵ From 1702 to 1785 it sent to the American colonies numerous missionaries, catechists, and schoolmasters with instructions to promote the conversion of negro slaves.³⁶ Indeed the catechists were appointed for this express purpose.³⁷ Besides, the society distributed sermons, catechisms, and other literature, to aid the work,³⁸ and established several schools especially for religious instruction of negroes.³⁹ Appeals were made by the society for funds to be used for Christianizing the negro, and by 1741 they amounted to about £2500.⁴⁰ The society also prepared a bill, to be offered to Parliament, to oblige masters to cause children of slaves to be baptized.⁴¹ The annual sermons preached before the S. P. G. by noted clergymen of the Church of England were printed, together with abstracts of the proceedings of the society; and both were effective agencies in furthering interest in the conversion of negro slaves.⁴²

Other agencies include a society closely allied to the S. P. G., founded in 1723 by Dr. Bray, and called "Associates of Dr. Bray", whose authority was ratified by a decree in Chancery, June 24, 1730.⁴³ One of its objects was to give religious instruction to negroes and supply missionaries with books to this end. A school for negroes was opened in Philadelphia in 1758, and in 1760 similar schools were established in New York, Newport, Rhode Island, and Williamsburg, Virginia, all of which were in operation up to 1775.⁴⁴ Two other societies aided to some extent the conversion

³⁵ *Classified Digest*, pp. 925-928, for charter.

³⁶ *Abstract*, S. P. G., 1712-1713, p. 43. See also for text of instructions to missionaries and schoolmasters, with list of the former, *Classified Digest*, pp. 837-840, 844-845.

³⁷ Humphreys, p. 252.

³⁸ *Classified Digest*, p. 837.

³⁹ For the school at New York see note 134; for that in Charleston, S. C., see Dalcho, pp. 156-157, 164.

⁴⁰ Humphreys, pp. 250-251. "Letter of Bishop of London to Serious Christians", etc., *Abstract*, S. P. G., 1740-1741, p. 81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1713-1714, pp. 60-62.

⁴² A complete set of the sermons with abstracts, with one exception, is in the E. E. Ayer collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

⁴³ For a short account of the work of this society, see Kemp, pp. 14-15, 254-261.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256, 260, note. Benjamin Franklin was an active member of the Associates, and was chairman at their meeting in 1760. See *Writings of Franklin* (ed. Smyth), IV. 23.

of slaves. First, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. It helped to maintain missionaries to the Salzburgers in Georgia (1738-1776), who made great efforts for the conversion of slaves.⁴⁵ The Society for Promoting Christian Learning sent books, catechisms, etc. (1755-1761) to Samuel Davies of Virginia, for distribution among negroes.⁴⁶

We may now consider more in detail the attitude and work of the principal religious denominations as organized bodies. It is obvious that many troublesome questions would arise if Christian slaves were to be granted the same religious privileges as Christian free persons. The religious denominations were confronted with such problems as the following: the right of a church member to hold a slave; the endowment of churches with slaves; active efforts towards their conversion; formal religious instruction; church attendance; attitude towards baptism; admission as communicants in full standing; conduct after admission; grants of other privileges incident to church membership; and the relative responsibility of clergy and masters with respect to many of these particulars. The attitude of the principal religious denominations shows a considerable variety of beliefs and practices on such questions.

The Church of England did not raise the question of the right of its members to hold slaves, denied that there was any inconsistency between Christianity and slavery, and made no effort to emancipate negroes because of religious scruples. Indeed the Bishop of London had declared, in 1727, that Christianity did not make "the least Alteration in Civil Property; that the Freedom which Christianity gives, is a Freedom from the Bondage of Sin and Satan, and from the Dominion of those Lusts and Passions and inordinate Desires; but as to their outward condition they remained as before even after baptism".⁴⁷ The clergy held slaves⁴⁸ themselves, and the churches accepted them as a form of endowment.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the Church of England made great efforts towards the conversion of slaves, favored formal religious instruction by both clergy and masters, urged the clergy to persuade masters to allow their slaves to attend church, and baptized and admitted them as communicants.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Jacobs, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 157; Allen and McClure, *History of the S. P. C. K.*, pp. 391-392.

⁴⁶ See note 125.

⁴⁷ Humphreys, p. 265.

⁴⁸ *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1734-1735, p. 50; 1741-1742, p. 55; concerning slaves of rectors of St. Helen's Parish, S. C. Perry, *Hist. Coll. Am. Col. Ch.* (Va.), p. 280; Bolton, *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Westchester County* (N. Y.), p. 250 (Rye, 1731); pp. 62-63 (Westchester, 1729).

⁴⁹ *N. C. Col. Rec.*, I, 734, letter of Mr. Adams, missionary of S. P. G., 1710; Beverley, *The History of Virginia* (London, 1722), p. 227.

⁵⁰ See note 120.

Of the various dissenting sects, the Friends alone, before the Revolution, seriously questioned, because of religious scruples, the right of church members to hold slaves. The Society of Friends was the only denomination that gradually forced members who held slaves to dispose of them or suffer expulsion from the church.⁵¹ It also favored the conversion of slaves. As early as 1657 George Fox urged the right of slaves to religious instruction,⁵² and in 1693 George Keith advised members to give their slaves "a Christian Education".⁵³ A minute of the yearly meeting of Pennsylvania, 1696, urged those who had negroes to be "careful of them, bring them to meetings, or have meetings with them in their families, and restrain them from loose and lewd living, as much as in them lies".⁵⁴ The yearly meetings in the Southern colonies sometimes raised the question whether Friends instructed their slaves in the principles of the Christian religion, for example in Virginia in 1722.⁵⁵ In North Carolina, 1752, the yearly meeting urged masters to encourage negroes to attend church,⁵⁶ and in 1758 it was agreed that meetings should be held at specified times at four designated places for the benefit of slaves.⁵⁷ The New England yearly meeting, 1769, advised Friends to take them to places of religious worship, and give such as were young "as much learning that they may be capable of reading".⁵⁸ While the official pronouncements of the yearly meetings indicate a strong interest in the religious welfare of slaves, in practice many Quakers held slaves, and it was not until just before the Revolution that severe measures were adopted to disown such members. Many refused to follow the suggestion of the yearly meetings and even the elders and ministers were holders of slaves.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Thomas, "The Attitude of the Society of Friends toward Slavery in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", etc., *Papers of the American Society of Church History*, VIII, 263-299, especially pp. 277, 283.

⁵² Fox, *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles*, etc. (Philadelphia, 1831), I, 144, epistle 153, "To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves."

⁵³ *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, XIII, 265-270.

⁵⁴ Thomas, p. 269. See also the letter of the yearly meeting of Friends of Pennsylvania, 1754, printed in Clarkson, *History of the Rise, Progress and Abolition of the African Slave-Trade* (London, 1808), I, 142.

⁵⁵ Thomas, p. 287. See also Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, p. 200, for meeting of 1757.

⁵⁶ Thomas, p. 290.

⁵⁷ Bassett, *Slavery and Servitude in North Carolina* (Johns Hopkins Univ. Stud. in Hist. and Polit. Sci., series XIV.), pp. 219-220. Cf. Weeks, p. 206.

⁵⁸ Thomas, p. 279. Elihu Coleman, the Quaker preacher of Nantucket, declared (1753) that Friends told their slaves to be Christians and be baptized "and so they do" (*Friends Review*, V, 102). Friends in Newport, R. I., sometimes took their slaves to church with them. Peterson, *History of Rhode Island*, pp. 104-105.

⁵⁹ Kalm, *Travels into North America*, 1748. "The quakers alone scrupled to have slaves; but they are no longer so nice and they have as many negroes as other people." In Pinkerton, *Voyages*, etc. (London, 1812), XIII, 501. See also Sandiford, *Brief Examination*, etc. (1729), as quoted by Moore, *Notes on the*

George Ross reported in 1727 that the Quakers of his parish in Delaware left their slaves, in respect to instruction in the Christian religion, to "the natural light".⁶⁰ Mr. Wetmore declared, February 20, 1727/8, that at Rye, New York, the Quakers in his parish refused to allow slaves religious instruction.⁶¹ It appears, moreover, that slaves were not allowed to participate in the meetings, at least in Pennsylvania.⁶²

The attitude of Puritans and Congregationalists as a whole cannot be easily determined, because of the absence of any general representative body or head. Each church might determine for itself all the questions involved with respect to the relation of its members to slaves. There seems to have been little effort among the early Puritans to Christianize them. John Eliot protested against the treatment of negroes in Massachusetts, and (according to Cotton Mather's report) "had long lamented it with a Bleeding and Burning Passion, that the English used their Negro's but as their Horses or their *Oxen*, and that so little care was taken about their immortal Souls". Eliot declared that masters prevented and hindered their instruction, and proposed that those having negroes within two or three miles of him, should send them to him once a week for catechizing and instruction.⁶³ The Congregational clergy held slaves without scruple, and the town of Suffield, Connecticut, even voted (1726) their pastor, Rev. Mr. Devotion, "£20 towards the purchase of his negroes".⁶⁴ A few churches seem to have taken action against slavery; for example, that of Newport, Rhode Island (1769), under Dr. Samuel Hopkins.⁶⁵ Moreover, slaves were often baptized and admitted to the churches as communicants.⁶⁶ However,

History of Slavery in Massachusetts, pp. 80-81. An indirect endowment of a monthly meeting of Friends in Maryland, 1702, is cited by Thomas, pp. 283-284.

⁶⁰ Perry, *Historical Collections*, etc. (Del.), p. 46.

⁶¹ Bolton, p. 250. For negligence of Quakers in North Carolina see Journal of Benjamin Ferris, the Quaker missionary, in *Friend's Miscellany*, XII. 255-257, and John Woolman's *Journal* (1757, ed. Whittier, 1873), pp. 117-118.

⁶² Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, p. 44.

⁶³ Quoted by Moore, p. 37, note. Cotton Mather accuses masters of neglect, and says they "deride, neglect, and oppose all due means of bringing their poor negroes unto our Lord". *Magnalia*, etc., vol. I., book III. (Hartford, 1855), p. 581; first published in London, 1702. See note 138.

⁶⁴ Trumbull (ed.), *Memorial History of Hartford County*, II. 406. See also Caulkins, *History of Norwich* (1749), p. 328. Negro slaves were owned by such noted clergymen as Rev. John Davenport of New Haven; Rev. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, Mass.; and Rev. Ezra Stiles of Newport, R. I.; and many others. See Fowler, "Historical Status of the Negro in Connecticut", *Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries*, third series, III. 13.

⁶⁵ Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, etc. (1852), pp. 41-43, about 1769.

⁶⁶ Gillespie, *A Century of Meriden* (Conn.), pt. I., p. 244. Cotton Mather was greatly interested in the conversion and baptism of negro slaves. Cf. his *Diary*, in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, seventh series, VIII. 379, 442, 478, 532 (1716-1718). Ezra Stiles preached to a meeting of about 40 negroes in Rhode Island, February 19, 1770. See his *Diary*, I. 39, see also pp. 204, 247-248. See note 140.

the fear that freedom might result from baptism is shown by a petition of certain ministers of Massachusetts to the General Court in 1694, asking the passage of a bill expressly denying that baptism conferred freedom, because masters deprived their slaves of this privilege.⁶⁷ In Connecticut (1738) there was a meeting of the "General Association of the Colony", at which an inquiry was made whether infant slaves of Christian masters might be baptized in "their masters right: Provided they Suitably Promise and Engage to bring them up in the Ways of Religion". Another inquiry was whether it was the duty of masters to offer such children and promise as provided for in the first query. To both of these inquiries an affirmative reply was given.⁶⁸

The first Presbyterian church in Philadelphia was organized in 1698. A Presbytery was formed in 1705, and rival synods of New York and Philadelphia existed from 1741 to 1758, when they were united. The right of members to hold slaves was not questioned in any of these bodies, nor did they take official action towards the emancipation or conversion of slaves before 1774.⁶⁹ Individual clergymen, like Samuel Davies, made efforts to Christianize slaves and urged masters to send them to church and have them baptized. Davies himself baptized and admitted slaves as communicants.⁷⁰ The diary of Col. James Gordon, a Presbyterian of Lancaster County, Virginia, shows that slaves attended the church of Mr. Todd; and that some of them were admitted as communicants.⁷¹ In one case at least, a Presbyterian church was presented with a slave as an endowment.⁷²

The Methodists had an early advocate for slavery in the person of George Whitefield, who pleaded with the Georgia Trustees in 1751 to allow the introduction of slaves into Georgia. He had no doubt of the lawfulness of keeping slaves and declared that he would consider himself highly favored if he could "purchase a good number of them, to make their lives comfortable, and lay a founda-

⁶⁷ *Acts and Res. of the Prov. of Mass. Bay*, VII. 537. See note 18.

⁶⁸ *The Records of the General Association of the Colony of Connecticut*, 1738-1799 (Hartford, 1888), p. 6.

⁶⁹ John Robinson, *Testimony and Practice of the Presbyterian Church in Reference to American Slavery*, p. 10. In 1774 a committee was appointed to report on slavery but the synod agreed to defer the matter to their next meeting. It was not until 1787 that definite action opposing slavery was taken. Baird, *Collection of Acts, etc. of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, 1885), pp. 817-818.

⁷⁰ See his letter of October 2, 1750, Perry, *Hist. Coll. Am. Col. Ch.* (Va.), pp. 368-371; see also letter of 1756; note 125, *infra*.

⁷¹ *William and Mary College Quarterly*, XI. 109 (1759); XII. 4, 9 (1753), James Wetmore reports, 1727/8, that at Rye, New York, "Some Presbyterians will allow their servants [negroes] to be taught, but are unwilling they should be baptized." Bolton, p. 250.

⁷² *Wm. and Mary Col. Qr.*, XII. 10 (1763).

tion for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord".⁷³ Wesleyan Methodism was represented by societies formed in Maryland about 1766. The first conference was held at Philadelphia in 1773, attended by Francis Asbury and nine other English preachers acting under due authority from John Wesley, but no action was taken on slavery.⁷⁴ Individual clergymen, however, were against slavery, like Freeborn Garrettson, who manumitted his slaves;⁷⁵ and especially Francis Asbury, who writes in his *Journal*, June 23, 1776, "after preaching . . . I met the class, and then met the black people, some of whose unhappy masters forbid their coming for religious instruction".⁷⁶

There were comparatively few Baptists and Lutherans in the South before 1774, and fewer still held slaves. We have evidence that one Baptist church in Virginia, in 1758-1759, had admitted them as members.⁷⁷ In 1766 Mr. Barnett, a missionary of the S. P. G., wrote to the secretary from Brunswick, "New light baptists are very numerous in the southern parts of this parish—The most illiterate among them are their Teachers even Negroes speak in their Meetings."⁷⁸ The attitude of the Lutherans is best shown by the Salzburgers who settled in Georgia in 1738. They were at first opponents of slavery;⁷⁹ but owing to the want of suitable white laborers, their pastor Boltzius yielded, on the ground that the negro might be given moral and spiritual advantages.⁸⁰ He expressed joy when his first purchase proved to be "a Catholic Christian". The slaves were given freedom from labor on Sunday, and other church festivals, nor was labor required which would prevent them from attendance upon any week-day service. One of the plans of Boltzius

⁷³ Tyerman, *Life of Whitefield*, II. 272-273, letter dated March 22, 1751. See also his plea for the religious instruction of negroes, in the *New England Weekly Journal*, April 29, 1740.

⁷⁴ *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences annually held in America, 1773-1813* (New York, 1813), I. 5-6. It was not until 1780 that action was taken disapproving slavery. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁵ McTyeire, *History of Methodism*, p. 310.

⁷⁶ Asbury, *Journal* (New York, 1852), I. 141. See also Earnest, *The Religious Development of the Negro in Virginia*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Thom, *Struggle for Religious Freedom in Virginia* (J. H. Univ. Stud. in Hist. and Polit. Sci., ser. XVIII.), pp. 505-507, 515-517; Semple, *History of Baptists* (ed. Beale), pp. 291-292.

⁷⁸ *N. C. Col. Rec.*, VII. 164. A resolve of a Baptist denomination in North Carolina in 1783 gives one of the earliest expressions of opinion of any considerable body of Baptists on the duties of the master of a slave. It is to the effect that he should give slaves liberty to attend "the worship of God in his family" and exhort slaves to this end. Burkitt and Read, *Concise History of the Kehukee Baptist Association* (Halifax, 1803), p. 70.

⁷⁹ Jacobs, *History of Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, pp. 150, 167-168; Strobel, *The Salzburgers*, pp. 30, 80, 102-103.

⁸⁰ Jacobs, pp. 167-168; Strobel, p. 104. This was also advised by Urlsperger. "If you take slaves in faith, and with the intent of conducting them to Christ, the action will not be a sin, but may prove a 'benediction'" (*ibid.*).

was to buy a large number of young children and place them in the hands of thoroughly trustworthy Salzburger for religious instruction. He baptized a number of negro children.⁸¹ Heinrich Muhlenberg and his associates in Pennsylvania also endeavored to give negroes religious instruction.⁸²

It thus appears that the dissenting sects were interested to a greater or less extent in the conversion of slaves, and were generally willing to baptize and admit them into their churches. Only the Friends, however, could see any inconsistency in the holding of slaves by church members.⁸³ Though so many forces in State and Church were favorable to the conversion of slaves, progress was nevertheless exceedingly slow, and the results attained at the opening of the Revolution were comparatively meagre. Before tracing the actual progress it may be well to examine the reasons for continued opposition to the conversion of slaves, and consider other hindrances which interfered with the work.

With the introduction of slaves in large numbers, pressing problems of an economic, political, and social nature arose, which influenced masters to continue their opposition to conversion. Of great importance was the belief that religious instruction would impair their economic value. As early as 1680, Morgan Godwyn pointed out that the state of religion in the plantation was very low, and asserted that men knew "No other God but Money, nor Religion but Profit".⁸⁴ A writer in the *Athenian Oracle* says, "Talk to a *Planter* of the *Soul* of a *Negro*, and he'll be apt to tell ye (or at least his Actions speak it loudly) that the *Body* of one of them may be worth twenty Pounds; but the *Souls* of an hundred of them would not yield him one Farthing."⁸⁵ Among the principal arguments against conversion of slaves were, first, that it would increase the cost of maintenance. Time would be consumed in instructing them, and especially in their attending church. Sunday labor was common; some masters required their slaves to work on Sunday, as on other days, or compelled them to work for their own support on that day, in order to lessen the cost of maintenance.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Jacobs, p. 168. Compare letter of Boltzius to the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, in 1761, in Allen and McClure, *History of S. P. C. K.*, p. 392. In 1774-1775 the church of Ebenezer owned a negro boy and girl, Strobel, pp. 190-191.

⁸² Jacobs, p. 231. Heinrich Muhlenberg baptized 3 negro slaves at New Providence, Pa., in 1745. *Halle Reports* (Philadelphia, 1882, ed. W. J. Mann), p. 57. For the attitude of the Lutherans in New York see Jacobs, p. 119.

⁸³ The attitude of the Moravians, Catholics, and minor denominations is omitted for want of space.

⁸⁴ *The Negro's and Indians Advocate*, p. 39.

⁸⁵ Moore, p. 93, quoting from the *Athenian Oracle*, II. 460-463 (1705).

⁸⁶ *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, V. 26, reports of Mr. Thomas to S. P. G., 1705; Hewatt, I. 354; Bolton, pp. 62-63 (1729). See note 25.

Another and more serious effect of conversion was the alleged change in the attitude and character of slaves. It was asserted that conversion developed notions of religious equality, and made slaves haughty and dissatisfied, and increased the danger of insurrections. The notion was widespread that the converted negro became intractable and ungovernable, because of increased knowledge obtained through religious instruction.⁸⁷ A third objection was on social grounds. The belief was common that imported African negroes were hardly above beasts,⁸⁸ and the appearance of many negroes must have given ground for such a notion. Savages of the lowest types were quite different in appearance and character from the negro of the present generation, so much changed by infusion of white blood and contact with a Christian civilization. From a social standpoint, association with the imported negro was extremely objectionable. To mingle with him in church, or to receive him on terms of equality at the communion table, was not only undesirable but positively dangerous.⁸⁹ Kalm, the Swedish traveller, notes (1748) that masters feared to have their negroes converted because they would grow proud "on seeing themselves upon a level with their masters in religious matters".⁹⁰

Besides the specific reasons mentioned, one must consider those of a more general character. In the colonies where slaves were most numerous, a vital interest in religion was lacking. The form rather than the substance was most emphasized.⁹¹ There was also a lack of clergymen and missionaries to carry on the work, and very often those sent to the colonies were not particularly interested in the welfare of the negro slaves.⁹² In the character of many of the clergy in question one sees still other causes for low religious

⁸⁷ Hugh Jones, *Present State of Virginia* (ed. of 1865), pp. 70-71 (1724); Brickell, *The Natural History of North Carolina* (reprint by J. B. Grimes), pp. 272-274 (1737); Hewatt, pp. 351-352, 355-356; *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1712-1713, p. 43; Thomas Bacon, *Four Sermons, upon the Great and Indispensable Duty of all Christian Masters and Mistresses to bring up their Negro Slaves in the Knowledge and Fear of God* (London, 1750), pp. 81-82; Samuel Davies, *The Duty of Christians to propagate their Religion among Heathens, earnestly recommended to the Masters of Negroe Slaves in Virginia* (sermon 1757, London, 1758), p. 37. See note 145.

⁸⁸ Godwyn, *Advocate*, etc., pp. 3, 10-13, 40; Humphreys, p. 235; Hewatt, p. 355. See note 113.

⁸⁹ Godwyn, pp. 38, 139-140; *Classified Digest*, p. 15; Brickell, p. 48. The danger from contagious diseases is one of the less-known evils of the slavery system.

⁹⁰ Kalm, p. 503. See also McCrady, "Slavery in South Carolina", *Report*, Am. Hist. Assoc., 1895, p. 644.

⁹¹ Perry (Va.), pp. 323-344; especially 332-334 (letter of Forbes on the state of religion in Virginia in 1724); Hawks, *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States* (Va.), pp. 86-87, 92 (1722).

⁹² Humphreys, pp. 250-251. The reports of missionaries of the S. P. G. show that comparatively few of them took active interest in the conversion of slaves. See also Bassett, *Slav. and Serv. in N. C.*, pp. 215-216.

life.⁹³ Missionaries and clergymen write of the indifference of masters to their own religious welfare.⁹⁴ If they were not interested in religion for themselves, it is certain that they would not be anxious for the religious welfare of their slaves. Indeed, this indifference on the part of the masters was the occasion for many of the complaints of missionaries. It appeared in several forms. Sometimes masters did not offer positive objection or opposition, but were so little interested that they would not take the time or trouble to give religious instruction themselves,⁹⁵ or encourage their slaves to attend church,⁹⁶ or aid the clergyman or missionary by showing interest in the religious life of the slave after his conversion.⁹⁷ When the masters were positively hostile,⁹⁸ of course nothing could be done by the missionaries. Under such circumstances clergymen who were willing to give part of their time and effort to religious instruction of slaves, were often afraid even to mention the subject, because of the fear of incurring the ill-will of the masters.⁹⁹

A not inconsiderable hindrance to the work was the divided responsibility for religious instruction of slaves. It is evident that this would fall in part on the clergy, in part on the masters. Owing to the large number of negroes, it was usually impossible for the clergyman of a parish to assume the whole burden himself. Bishop Fleetwood's sermon in 1711, and the address of the Bishop of London in 1727, held that masters were responsible for the religious instruction of their slaves.¹⁰⁰ The answers to the latter's queries on this subject (1724) show that the clergy were inclined to place the burden of instruction on their parishioners, while most of the latter who were not opposed, expected the clergy to do all the work.¹⁰¹

Another hindrance to religious instruction of many slaves was their inability to understand, or profit by, the Christian religion,

⁹³ Perry (Va.), Forbes letter, pp. 332-333. Devereux Jarratt wrote John Wesley that there was only one Church of England clergyman in Virginia who was not a reproach to his vocation. Moore, *Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia*, p. 50. See also Hawks (Va.), pp. 88-90; *N. C. Col. Rec.*, VII. 106, letter of Governor Tryon (1765), who wishes "not the sweepings of the Universities . . . but some clergy of character".

⁹⁴ *Classified Digest*, p. 15; Perry, pp. 254-255. Compare the sermon of Samuel Davies (1757), p. 41; Thomas Bacon, *Four Sermons*, 1750, pp. 101, 114-115.

⁹⁵ Perry (Va.), p. 278; (Md.), p. 305; *Abstract*, *S. P. G.*, 1760-1761 (N. C.), pp. 58-59; *ibid.*, 1739-1740 (S. C.), pp. 56-57.

⁹⁶ Perry (Md., 1731), pp. 306-307; (Va., 1724), p. 267.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (Va.), p. 289; *N. C. Col. Rec.*, VI. 265 (1760), letter of Mr. Read.

⁹⁸ Perry (Md.), pp. 304-305; Hewatt, p. 352; St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1770-1781, ed. Blake), pp. 165-166.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See sermon, February 16, 1710/1 (London, 1711). Humphreys, pp. 257-271.

¹⁰¹ The replies to queries are printed for Virginia and Maryland in Perry, see note 33.

due to mental incapacity, lack of knowledge of the English language, or disinclination to accept a new religion in place of their heathen rites. The question of mental capacity was a matter of some dispute. Many planters, either because of real conviction or for other motives, declared that their negro slaves were only beasts, incapable of instruction, and besides, as some asserted, were without souls.¹⁰² It was quite generally agreed among missionaries that most of the adult imported negroes, "Guinea" negroes as they were often called, could not be converted successfully.¹⁰³ A sharp distinction was drawn, however, between this class and those born in the colonies. Not only were the former stupid, but many adult imported negroes failed to learn the English language well enough to appreciate or profit by religious instruction, a fact frequently commented on by the clergy.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, those born in the country were considered more intelligent, and generally could learn English well enough for such purposes.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the statement of Mr. Williamson, rector of St. Paul's, Kent County, Maryland (1731), describes a condition on many plantations. He divides negroes into three classes: first, those so grossly ignorant that there was no possibility of successful religious instruction; second, those capable, that is, able to answer questions of the church catechism, but so egregiously wicked as to render baptism ineffectual; third, those duly qualified and of exemplary lives.¹⁰⁶

The character and environment of the average negro slave was an almost insuperable obstacle to his conversion. One should remember that the negro brought with him from Africa conceptions of morality, truthfulness, and rights of property, usually quite out of harmony with the teachings of Christianity. Then, too, conditions inherent in the slavery system hindered his moral and religious progress, even if he were well disposed towards conversion. Severe punishments, usually the result of his own conduct, excessively hard physical labor, and the practical reduction of the slave to a mere chattel, led to a life of deception, in order to avoid labor and punishment.¹⁰⁷ The environment of most slaves was hostile to a normal

¹⁰² See note 88.

¹⁰³ Perry (Va.), pp. 264-265; *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1740-1741, p. 63; Brickell, p. 272; Hugh Jones, p. 71; *Journal of House of Burgesses* (Va.), May 23, 1694. This is disputed by Hugh Jones, *op. cit.*; by Thomas Bacon, pp. 90-91; and by Samuel Davies, pp. 33-34. See note 113.

¹⁰⁴ Perry (Va.), p. 283; (Md.), p. 227.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* (Md.), p. 192; (Va.), p. 312; *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1723-1724 (S. C.), pp. 41-42; Brickell, p. 272.

¹⁰⁶ Perry (Md.), p. 305; see also Hugh Jones, pp. 70-71; Bacon, p. 93.

¹⁰⁷ For these points see a description of the religious condition of the negro slave in Maryland in Thomas Bacon, *Two Sermons preached to a Congregation of Black Slaves* (London, 1749), pp. 50-55, 64.

religious life. There was little direct religious instruction on the plantations, while the conversations which a slave heard and the scenes that were frequently enacted before his eyes, in his one-room shack called "home", were for the most part positively evil influences.¹⁰⁸ The almost universal immoral relations between the sexes, unchecked by laws to safeguard the institution of marriage; indeed the encouragement of polygamy and fornication, because of the law that the issue of a slave-mother remained a slave—all provided an environment almost as bad as could be imagined.

But even if the factors which have been mentioned had been favorable to the conversion of the slaves, the physical conditions in the Southern, and to a considerable extent in the Middle, colonies, would have been a great obstacle to the success of this work. The extent of territory often included in a Southern parish,¹⁰⁹ and the fact that plantations were ordinarily at considerable distances from each other, made it very difficult for the clergy to visit families, or for slaves to attend church or assemble easily at one place for religious instruction. Even as late as 1761 a missionary of the S. P. G. in North Carolina writes that most of the negroes of his parish were heathen, "it being very impossible for the Ministers in such extensive Parishes to perform their more immediate Duties in them, and find time sufficient for those poor Creatures Instructions, and very few if any of their masters will take the least Pains about it".¹¹⁰ Some of the colonies passed acts which hindered the Christianization of slaves, such as laws to prevent them from assembling in numbers, at places outside their master's plantation.¹¹¹ Even where there were laws to the contrary, the working of slaves on Sunday¹¹² was a common practice. In both cases the opportunity of the slave to meet for religious purposes was more or less restricted.

Keeping in mind the two groups of factors which promoted and

¹⁰⁸ Bacon, *Two Sermons*, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ See answers of the clergy of Virginia and Maryland, 1724, note 33, above.

¹¹⁰ *Abstract*, S. P. G., 1760-1761, pp. 58-59. Cf. Thomas Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 128. See also Davies, *The State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia; in a Letter to the Reverend Joseph Bellamy*, etc. (Boston, 1751), p. 23.

¹¹¹ Compare *Arch. of Md.*, XIX. 149, 157 (1695); Bacon, *Laws of Md.*, act of 1723, ch. XV.; McCord, *Stat. of S. C.*, VII. 352 (1712); *ibid.*, p. 386 (1735); *Ga. Col. Rec.*, XVIII. 135 (1735). Such acts, however, did not ordinarily prevent slaves attending church with their master's consent, Allinson, *Acts of Gen. Assem. of N. J.*, 1702-1776, pp. 191-192; and the Virginia act of 1723, though prohibiting assemblies, specifically forbids masters from prohibiting their slaves attending church on Sunday, Hening, *Stat. of Va.* (Richmond ed.), IV. 129, and repeated in 1748, *ibid.*, VI. 108; see also *Arch. of Md.*, XXV. 57. An act of North Carolina, 1715, forbade anyone to allow slaves to build a meeting-house on his land for the purpose of worship. *St. Rec. of N. C.*, XXIII. 65.

¹¹² On Sunday laws and labor see notes 25, 26, 86.

hindered the conversion of slaves, we may now consider the progress made before the Revolution. The testimony of Morgan Godwyn in 1680, and that of David Humphreys in 1730, agree to the effect that the state of religion in the Southern colonies was very low. If this was true of the white inhabitants, then the situation of the slaves must have been still worse. A declaration of the House of Burgesses of Virginia in 1699 denies that religious progress is possible in the case of *imported* negroes, because of the "Gros Barbarity and rudeness of their Manners, the variety and Strangeness of their Language and the weakness and shallowness of their Minds."¹¹³ In North Carolina Mr. Taylor reported in 1719 that masters were on the whole opposed to the conversion, baptism, and salvation of their slaves,¹¹⁴ and other missionaries make the same complaint.¹¹⁵ The letters from Mr. Thomas, 1703-1706, show that there were about 1000 slaves in the colony of South Carolina at this time, but he reports only four as Christianized and one baptized.¹¹⁶ Rev. Mr. Pownal reported in 1722 that there were about seven hundred slaves in his parish (Christ Church) a few of whom understood English, but very few "knew any Thing of God or Religion";¹¹⁷ and Mr. Hesell of St. Thomas Parish wrote in 1723/4 that there were 1100 negroes and Indian slaves and twenty free negroes in his parish, with "about 12 negroes baptiz'd, some of them free, and some Slaves".¹¹⁸

The first extensive survey of the religious conditions of negroes in the Southern colonies was made in 1724, when the Bishop of London sent queries to the clergy respecting the condition of the parishes. One of these queries reads, "Are there any infidels, bond or free, within your parish and what means are used for their conversion?"¹¹⁹ An analysis of the replies from twenty-nine parishes in Virginia shows that slaves were accustomed to attend church in eleven of them, but in most cases only a few were allowed this privilege, largely those born in this country who understood English. Likewise comparatively few were given religious instruction. According to nine replies, a few of the masters undertook the work themselves, and a few allowed the clergy to do so, espe-

¹¹³ *Journal of the House of Burgesses*, May 22, 1699.

¹¹⁴ *N. C. Col. Rec.*, II. 332.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I. 720, 858; II. 153.

¹¹⁶ "Letters of Samuel Thomas", missionary of S. P. G., *S. C. Hist. and Gen. Mag.*, IV. 278-285; V. 21-55 ("Documents concerning Mr. Thomas, 1702-1707").

¹¹⁷ Humphreys, p. 111.

¹¹⁸ *Abstract*, S. P. G., 1723-1724, p. 40. Cf. Mr. Read's report for Craven County, N. C.; he was "afraid most of the Negroes [about a thousand] may too justly be reckoned Heathens". *Ibid.*, 1760-1761, pp. 58-59.

¹¹⁹ See note 33.

cially in the case of the more intelligent; but it appears certain that the great bulk of the slaves neither attended church nor received religious instruction. A still smaller number were baptized and made communicants.¹²⁰ On the whole it appears that the sentiment of masters towards Christianization of slaves was distinctly hostile in about one-third of the parishes reported, hostile in the remainder for imported negroes and those who understood little English, and favorable for a few of their slaves who they believed might profit thereby. A petition from various persons, urging the Christianization of negro children "borne in this Country", was presented to the House of Burgesses in 1723, but the report of the committee to whom it was referred reads, "Resolved that the same be rejected being at present impracticable."¹²¹

Replies from South Carolina are available from eight parishes.¹²² In St. James (Santee) parish, it is declared that there are many slaves, but only one negro man is mentioned as a Christian. In St. John's parish there were "no means used for their Conversion". In St. Philip's parish there were about 2000 black and Indian slaves, but "no means are used for their Conversion". In St. James (Goose Creek) parish there were about 2000 negro slaves, but the rector reports that "the best means are used for their Conversion which the present posture of affairs will admit of which will I hope hereafter have a more prosperous aspect than at present". In Christ Church parish there were about 700 negro slaves "all of them in Infidelity. Both public preaching and private exhortation I have used with their Owners, but all those methods at present are ineffectual." In St. Andrew's parish, though there were a great number of slaves, "all the means I use for their conversion is to show their Masters their obligations, but few or none will be prevailed on". In St. Dennis parish the rector replied: "All Infidels in my Parish are Bond Servants and their Masters will not consent to have them instructed." In Dorchester, St. George's parish it is stated, "I have hitherto indeavored in vain to prevail with their masters to convince them of the necessity of having their slaves made Christians." It will be seen that these reports for South Carolina are much more discouraging than those of Virginia or Maryland, a

¹²⁰ Baptism occurred in 17 parishes but numbers were small and many of these were infants. Communicants are mentioned in two parishes.

¹²¹ *Journal of House of Burgesses*, May 17, 1723, pp. 368, 370. See also the proposition sent to the Bishop of London in 1724, outlining a plan for the conversion of negroes. Perry (Va.), p. 344. The replies from the clergy of Maryland in 1724 and 1731 show that the religious condition of the negroes was very similar to that of Virginia. See note 33.

¹²² The replies are not printed, but may be found in the Hawks MSS., volume for South Carolina. For mention of this material see *Report*, Am. Hist. Assoc., 1898, pp. 59-60.

situation that was apparently maintained throughout the colonial period.

From 1724 to 1776 there was less opposition on the part of masters towards both conversion and baptism, and a larger number of conversions and baptisms are reported than in the earlier period. But it must be remembered that in the later period the increase in the slave population was very large, especially by importation. The figures seem to show that there was no very great increase in the proportionate number of slaves Christianized. The letters of Samuel Davies and other Presbyterian ministers in Virginia, 1750-1761, show some progress. Davies reports in 1750 that there were as many as a thousand negroes in Virginia converted and baptized, about one hundred belonging to Presbyterians.¹²³ In this same letter he writes that he himself had baptized forty in a year and a half, and had admitted seven or eight to full communion.¹²⁴ In 1756 he said "the Protestant dissenters lie under an odium in this colony—yet the Negroes in these parts are freely allowed to attend upon my ministry";¹²⁵ but he laments "upon the almost universal neglect of the many thousand of poor slaves . . . who generally continue Heathens in a Christian Country".¹²⁶ So a report of a yearly meeting of Friends in Virginia (1764) declared that "more care should be taken to instruct negroes in the Christian religion".¹²⁷ Other evidence points in the same direction.¹²⁸

In South Carolina we may judge of progress from a letter of Rev. Mr. Harrison (1759) of St. James (Goose Creek) parish, who said that he had two hundred families in his parish, and his congregation generally consisted of 150 whites and fifty to sixty negroes. His communicants numbered thirty-one whites and twenty-six negroes.¹²⁹ The inhabitants of this parish were, however, un-

¹²³ Perry (Va.), p. 369. The slave population of the colonies is here given for two dates, approximately 1755 and 1775. For 1755 we have in Maryland, 46,225, Virginia, 116,000, North Carolina, 20,000, South Carolina, 45,000, Georgia, 2,000—total 229,225. For 1775 we have in Maryland, 70,000, Virginia, 200,000, North Carolina, 45,000, South Carolina, 110,000, Georgia, 15,000—total, 440,000. There were about 29,000 slaves in the Middle Colonies, and 16,000 in New England in 1775. These estimates are based on those of Dexter, "Estimates of Population in the American Colonies", in *Proceedings, Am. Antiq. Soc.*, new series, V, 22-50. They must be recognized as only approximately correct, for accurate figures are unobtainable.

¹²⁴ Perry (Va.), p. 369. See also Mr. Gavin's letter telling of his success in St. James's parish, Goochland, 1738. He reports 172 blacks baptized. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

¹²⁵ *Letters from the Rev. Samuel Davies and others, showing the State of Religion in Virginia particularly among the Negroes*, etc. (second ed., London, 1757), p. 20. Letter to J. F., March 2, 1756.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22. See also Davies's sermon, p. 8, note 87, *supra*.

¹²⁷ Thomas, p. 288.

¹²⁸ E. g., Benjamin Ferris expressed a similar opinion; see Weeks, p. 202; see also note 61.

¹²⁹ *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1759-1760, pp. 61-62.

usually favorable to the conversion of slaves. Rev. Mr. Clark, rector of St. Philip's, Charleston, said in 1757/8 that there was great negligence among white people respecting the religious education of negroes, and laments that there was not one "Civil Establishment in the Colony for the Christian Instruction of fifty Thousand negroe Slaves". He says, moreover, that the duties of the clergy, "besides many other Difficulties and Obstructions" prevent them from remedying the evil.¹³⁰ Hewatt writes discouragingly of conditions in South Carolina at the opening of the Revolution. He says that the negro slaves were "excluded in a manner from the pale of the Christian Church"; that the S. P. G. had, a few years before, "no less than twelve missionaries in Carolina with instructions to give all assistance in their power for this laudable purpose; but it is well known, that the fruit of their labors has been very small and inconsiderable".¹³¹

In the Middle Colonies and in New England we are concerned with a very much smaller number of slaves throughout the period. However, much the same opposition to conversion came from masters,¹³² and progress was not marked. Although there were about 1400 negroes and Indian slaves in New York City (1725/6),¹³³ the catechist of the S. P. G. writes that from 1732 to 1740 but 219 had been baptized, only twenty-four of whom were adults.¹³⁴ In 1770 thirty communicants were reported.¹³⁵ The replies¹³⁶ made in 1724 from seven parishes in New York show considerable opposition to conversion as in Rye and Staten Island, with very few reported as baptized or as communicants,¹³⁷ and later reports do not indicate much improvement.¹³⁸ In New England the early period shows negligence,¹³⁹ though after 1730 reports are somewhat more favorable.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁰ *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1757-1758, p. 50.

¹³¹ Hewatt, pp. 353-354. For progress in North Carolina, 1735-1776, see Bassett, pp. 215-216; cf. also Brickell, p. 274; also note 151.

¹³² Perry (Pa.), p. 165 (1728), cf. also pp. 184, 196.

¹³³ *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1725-1726, pp. 37-38.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1740-1741, pp. 71-72. An excellent account of the Catechizing School of the S. P. G. in New York City is found in Kemp, ch. IX.; see note 39.

¹³⁵ *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1770-1771, p. 24.

¹³⁶ The replies from some of these parishes are printed, e. g., Westchester, Rye, and New Rochelle, in Bolton, *Hist. of the Ch. in Westchester Co.*, pp. 47-49, 227-230, 436-437; Hempstead, in *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, XXII. 131; and Jamaica, *Documentary History of New York* (1850), III. 185-187. The replies for other parishes (New York and Staten Island) may be found in the Hawks MSS., volume for New York. See note 122.

¹³⁷ Bolton, pp. 250, 256, 258, 266, for period 1727-1735; Humphreys, pp. 209, 213.

¹³⁸ Cf. Bolton, pp. 77, 84 (1764-1769).

¹³⁹ See note 63, and *Col. Rec. Conn.*, 1678-1689, p. 298; answers to queries, 1680.

¹⁴⁰ See note 66, and *Abstract, S. P. G.*, 1740/1-1741/2, p. 41; and 1746-1747, p. 52; McSparran, *Letter Book and Abstract of Out Services* (Boston, 1899), pp. 4-25 (catechizing and baptism of negroes, R. I., 1743-1751).

This survey of the colonies points to the conclusion that the number of slaves who were even nominal Christians bore a small proportion to the total number, while it is certain that a very much smaller number can be said to have lived Christian lives. It is evident that the comparatively few clergymen and missionaries who took an interest in the conversion of slaves, could make little impression on the whole slave population. This threw the main responsibility on the masters; but the testimony respecting their general hostility or negligence is almost unanimous, from both the clergy and other witnesses. Moreover, in considering the figures based on reports of the clergy some discount must be made, due to their well-known enthusiasm for favorable accounts of conversion, church attendance, etc., and the fact that many of the baptisms mentioned were those of infants.¹⁴¹ We should also remember that a Christian life was not a necessary result of this ceremony. Then, too, the tendency of the clergy of the established church to rely on outward forms rather than inward regeneration, as a test of Christianity, is too well known to need comment.¹⁴² Those who described their methods usually laid stress on ability to say the creed, repeat the ten commandments, or the catechism, as the main test for baptism.¹⁴³ The actual effect of nominal, or even real, conversion upon the conduct of slaves was in dispute. Many asserted that conversion made them worse than before.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand there is contrary evidence, though much of this is theoretical rather than concrete.¹⁴⁵ It must be admitted that the conditions which often surrounded the negro slave made it very difficult for him to lead a real Christian life.

It is impossible to assert how many slaves were even nominally converted. David Humphreys, the historian of the S. P. G., reported in 1730 that some hundreds had been converted.¹⁴⁶ Dean Berkeley said in 1731: "The religion of these people [slaves], as is natural to suppose, takes after that of their masters. Some few are baptized, several frequent the different assemblies, and far the greater part none at all."¹⁴⁷ Peter Kalm, the Swedish traveller,

¹⁴¹ *Abstract, S. P. G., 1752-1753*, p. 51 (N. C.); *ibid.*, 1754-1755 (N. Y.), p. 48; *ibid.*, 1759-1760 (N. Y.), p. 47.

¹⁴² See note 91.

¹⁴³ Cf. letter of Mr. Taylor, missionary of S. P. G. to North Carolina, 1716, *N. C. Col. Rec.*, II. 332; Perry (Md.), pp. 306-307; *Abstract, S. P. G., 1753-1754*, p. 55; *Classified Digest*, pp. 15-16. Cf. also Davies, *Duties of Christians to propagate their Religion*, etc., pp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁴ See note 87.

¹⁴⁵ Godwyn, pp. 125-127; Jones, pp. 70-71; Hewatt, pp. 355-356; Moore, *Notes on Hist. of Slav. in Mass.* (quoting writer in *Athenian Oracle*), p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ Humphreys, p. 233.

¹⁴⁷ Sermon before S. P. G. (1731) quoted in Updike, *Hist. of Episc. Ch. in Narragansett, R. I.* (1847), p. 177.

declared in 1748: "It is likewise greatly to be pitied that the masters of the Negroes in most of the English Colonies take little care of their Spiritual welfare and let them live on in their pagan darkness."¹⁴⁸

We must conclude from all the evidence that the struggle between the contending forces had on the whole resulted in a victory for those which were antagonistic to the conversion of negroes. John Griffith, a Quaker missionary to Virginia, declared in 1765: "It is too manifest to be denied, that the life of religion is almost lost where slaves are very numerous; and it is impossible it should be otherwise, the practice being as contrary to the spirit of christianity as light is to darkness."¹⁴⁹ If Griffith's observation is true, then the institution of slavery must be considered a primary cause, not only in greatly hindering the conversion of the negroes, but also, where slaves were numerous, in preventing important religious advances among the whites. Thus the heart of the difficulty is apparent. As one missionary states, "It can hardly be expected that those should promote the spiritual welfare of this meanest branch of their families who think but little (if at all) of their own eternal salvation."¹⁵⁰

The reasons for the failure of the clergy and missionaries to accomplish more, have been well expressed by Hewatt in accounting for conditions in South Carolina at the opening of the Revolution. He says:

Whether their small success ought to be ascribed to the rude and untractable dispositions of the negroes, to the discouragements and obstructions thrown in the way by their owners, or to the negligence and indolence of the missionaries themselves, we cannot pretend to determine. Perhaps we may venture to assert, that it has been more or less owing to all these different causes. One thing is very certain, that the negroes of that country, a few only excepted, are to this day as great strangers to Christianity, and as much under the influence of Pagan darkness, idolatry and superstition, as they were at their first arrival from Africa.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Kalm, *Travels in North America* (ed. 1770), I. 397.

¹⁴⁹ Weeks, p. 203; see also note 91. So Samuel Fothergill describes conditions in Maryland, 1756. "Maryland is poor; the gain of oppression, the price of blood is upon that province . . . I mean their purchasing, and keeping in slavery, negroes, the ruin of true religion the world over, wherever it prevails." Crosfield, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labors of Samuel Fothergill*, p. 282, letter dated November 9, 1756. See also for North Carolina, *ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁵⁰ Perry (Pa.), p. 184.

¹⁵¹ Hewatt, *op. cit.*, p. 354. The latest book dealing with the education of the negro is that by C. G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro prior to 1861* (New York, 1915). Chapter II. deals specifically with the religious education of the negro before the Revolution. See also original documents in appendix, pp. 337-359, and bibliographies, pp. 399-434.

It is evident that much of the difficulty lay in the system of slavery itself. The lack of a sufficient number of earnest workers was a second great difficulty. But much greater progress could undoubtedly have been made but for the low state of religion among the masters and the positive hostility to conversion of slaves on the part of a large number of them. One of the chief reasons for this opposition seems to have been economic in character. Thus one can understand how ideals growing out of a desire for material gain triumphed, for the most part, over those religious and moral in character. In explanation of this economic reason it must be recognized that many were convinced that the conversion of slaves would inevitably lead to increased demands from the negro for equality—religious, social, and political—a situation that would not only reduce the economic value of the slave, but might seriously endanger those conventions between master and slave which were deemed necessary for effective control. Thus fundamentally the contest between the opposing forces involved, in the opinion of many, the life of the institution of slavery itself, and perhaps the very existence of Southern society so far as it was based on this system.

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